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ABSTRACT

This paper begins by discussing the problems encountered by nontraditional university students who, for a variety of reasons, lack the skills necessary to complete assignments that require library research, and the role of the librarian in assisting these students. It then describes two approaches being used by librarians at Northeastern Illinois University to address the task of teaching students the skills that constitute information literacy, i.e., how to recognize the need to gather information on a given topic, to have the capacity to sift through information sources to locate the information needed, to evaluate the information found, and then incorporate the relevant information into a coherent project. The first approach described is the Research Paper Consultation Project, a pilot project that offers students the opportunity to meet with a librarian on a one-to-one basis and ask questions, explore options, and present their learning needs in a non-threatening exchange. The second approach described is an intensive one-semester course co-taught by librarians that focuses on subject matter as well as technique. It is noted that both of these approaches have been successful. A third approach is suggested: a course that incorporates subject matters as well as the practical skills in learning how to find answers. It is concluded that all librarians are teachers and that libraries are dynamic classrooms where librarians can be instrumental in facilitating knowledge in creative ways. (BBM)

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Academic Libraries as Dynamic Classrooms

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Paper presented at the 1992 Illinois Annual Conference
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"Academic Libraries As Dynamic Classrooms"
A paper presented at the 1992 Illinois Annual Conference, Wednesday March 17, 1992 Presentors: Jane Catherine Jurgens, Assistant Professor, Northeastern Illinois University and Dario J. Villa, Assistant Professor, Northeastern Illinois University.

We have for some time been exploring the special educational needs of a unique, ever-growing college student population, collectively identified as the "non-traditional student" and the role of the the library professional in meeting those needs. Non-traditional students are, for example, those students who have been educated in inner city schools, students who are new to this country, who, though bi-lingual, may lack necessary oral and written language skills, the children of recent immigrants who themselves received no formal education, older students, both men and women, who are either returning to the job market or are seeking to advance themselves in their present job. Northeastern Illinois University has one of the most diverse student populations in the greater Chicago area. The University is one of five public institutions in the State of Illinois. It comes under the auspices of the Board of Governors Schools (BOG) of State Colleges and Universities of Illinois. Originally a teacher training college, the University has a unique identity as a teaching, service oriented institution with an emphasis on community outreach, committment to a population of diversity and to learners with special needs. Some of our special programs include, for example, the "Kaskaskia Plan" in which a student many construct an individual major; "University Without Walls" where an individual can earn credit based on her/his own experience on and off campus; "New Directions" is a program for

returning adults; the Office of Women's Services offers support for female students and deals with issues unique to women. The Ronald Williams LIbrary has a full range of traditional and computerized services to support our diverse population. The Library has an extensive collection of textbook and curriculum materials in the Curriculum Materials Center (CMC). The Library is a government depository for federal and state documents and has recently become an Illinois Regional Archives Depository (IRAD) for historical municipal and country records of Chicago and Cook County.

We as library professional confront the diversity of our student population on a daily basis. Time and time again, at the reference desk, in the classroom or in other personal encounters, we see studetns who lack fundamental research skills and the motivation necessary to succeed in a college enviornment. We have students who lack language skills needed to communicate effectively and deal with complex or even simple assignments. They may fear the new technology and/or lack the knowledge of traditional sources. We have students who are "task oriented" rather than "research oriented." Students who are focused on the "correct" solution to a problem more often demand an "immediate" answer to a specific question. More often, they do not express an interest in the process of learning. They do not know what "research" is, i.e., how to effectively use a variety of instructional materials, both traditional and computerized, to achieve their objectives. Often the traditional teaching faculty, in presenting the student with an assignment to complete, assumes a knowledge or a skill which the

student does not possess. The dynamics of communication/interaction with these students are complex. The reference interview, the all important first contact, has a keener edge to it. We are interested in developing effective strategies and instructional methodologies that will strength research skills and sharpen critical thinking; therefore, we have come to the conclusion that the library professional must take a more active teaching role and to see the library not as an addendum, something extra added to the traditional classroom but a unique classroom in itself. The library professional must adopt a teaching style that will complement not merely supplement the styles of the traditional teaching faculty. We at Northeastern have begun to address the issue of information illiteracy which we see as a general problem in education, but particularly as it pertains to library usage. We have begun to implement programs that can assist students, both undergraduate and graduate, cope with the complexities of the modern library. We want to focus on that idea because we think that we have begun a program that can assist students, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, to cope with the complexity of the modern library. Information illiteracy is not a new concept to us. Whether we are in the classroom or at an information/reference desk, all of us know the symptoms. We will outline the main points. It is foremost and in broadest terms, the incapacity to effectively use a library: Whether that library is the local neighborhood library housing several hundred titles or the Library of Congress, housing millions of volumes. It also means the incapacity to recognize the need to gather information, to locate that

information in the variety of sources in which information is stored and to effectively use or incorporate that information into whatever project is at hand. The opposite of the above is obviously to be information literate, which simply means the capacity to recognize the need to gather information, (I have a paper to write John Steinbeck therefore I better spend some quality time at the library), to have the capacity to sift through a voluminous and ever growing variety of information sources, to locate the information, to evaluate the information and then incorporate that information with its diverse points of view into a coherent project. The remainder of the discussion will focus on three ways that we feel will address the task of teaching students invaluable skills in INFORMATION LITERACY. One is the Research Paper Consultation Project (pass out handout) Two is a course which we co-teach every other semester -- the title of that course is Social Science Information Resources and Library Skills - Advanced Variant a prerequisite course in the Social Science degree program. Third is the idea that Northeastern as well as other institutions of higher learning must incorporate into their General Education curriculum a semester long course to teach students library research skills that will empower students to be competent library users during their education and equally important beyond their four years of college. Our experience with students at other institutions of higher learning were not all that different from students at Northeastern. We think that there is a universality today regarding poor preparation for all students. First we would like to discuss the pilot program, "Research Paper Consultation"

which we started less than a year ago and which we feel has been a success. This is not a novel idea and some of you may be familiar with, or part of institutions that offer such programs. For example, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign offer similar programs for their undergraduate students. The impetus to offer this service came from numerous informal discussions with both the library and the teaching faculty. The consensus was that many students were lacking basic library research skills. These ranged from students being intimidated by the online catalog (fear of Illinet-- mind you there may be some truth to this), the organization of the library, for example, call number, reference collection, subject organization, periodical indexes, both online and paper, formats for the construction of a bibliography. We could all come up with our own list..... With the Research Paper Consultation Project we wanted to offer students an opportunity to experience learning on a one-on-one basis. This simply meant that a student would be able to ask questions, to explore options, and to present their learning needs in a non-threatening exchange. We were all very enthusiastic and motivated to attempt this project and I must say that it has been a success. We are scheduling students on a daily basis. The questions they bring range from the complex to the very simple and the time allotted is usually taken by an individual student (one hour). One of the principal goals of this program is not only to provide for a one-to-one interchange, but to also teach the student that the library is not all that intimidating once some basic principles are learned. We also encourage students to act, and to

think for themselves. The number of students who have thus far used this service shows that we have succeeded in reaching out to students in need to learn invaluable skills. But we are certain that there are many students on campus who have not taken advantage of library services, and its committed faculty. We have also made the teaching faculty aware, that teaching is taking place in the library and that they can send their students to a program that will assist and teach them important skills.

The second part of the discussion will focus on the course that we co-teach at Northeastern. This course is an intensive semester long class that focuses on subject matter as well as technique. We begin with an introduction to the organization of information and proceed from that point to concentrate on information sources in the social sciences. Given the time restrictions we have here today, let me just say that this has been a very successful class and the reason for bringing this into the discussion is that without exception every student has indicated in our evaluations that their education would have been more meaningful had they had the opportunity to take a course such as this one at the very start of their university education. With this in mind, we would like to move to the last point of the discussion. We have said that all institutions of higher learning must incorporate a course that will teach students how to do library research. We do not mean the tour of the library and this is the card catalog... type of instruction. What we are referring to is a course that will incorporate subject matters as well as the practical in learning HOW TO FIND ANSWERS

rather than just the answers. We must teach s tudents skills of inquiry, the skills to discover and explore libra ries without fear. We are all teachers and libraries are dynamic classrooms where learning takes place in a variety of ways and we can be instrumental in facilitating knowledge in creat tive ways ....

Thank you for your attention and patience.....